

Reading Strategies Employed By Postgraduate TESL Learners in Reading Online Texts

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Abstract

This paper examines the reading strategies employed by postgraduate Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) learners in reading online texts at a public university in Bangi. Two research questions are explored in this paper. (1) What are the reading strategies employed by postgraduate TESL learners in reading online texts (2) Is there a significant difference among Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 TESL postgraduate students reading strategies? The participants in this study consist of 90 TESL postgraduate students and were required to answer a questionnaire measuring their metacognitive reading strategies. The results indicate that the students preferred Problem Solving Strategies as the best strategy. As for the second research question, only one item showed a significant difference among Year 1, 2 and 3 students. Through this study, students as well as educators should be aware of the importance of strategies employed in online reading.

Keywords: Teaching English as Second Language (TESL), metacognitive reading strategies, online reading strategies

1.0 Introduction

Reading plays a vital role in gaining new information in the learning process especially for students who are required to learn a second language. Khaki (2014) stressed the ability to read in a second language is crucial for learners in an international setting. However, being a student in the 21st century automatically exposes the students to read texts online especially students in the tertiary level as they usually have to be independent in their own reading in order to help the students in obtaining significant and desirable knowledge (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014) Thus, educators must consider the best strategy to be employed while reading online texts to enable the students to understand what has been read.

Although many researchers have paid attention to online reading (Anderson, 2003; Jafre, Majid & Anita, 2011; Mohamad et al, 2015) little research has been conducted on postgraduate TESL students on top of seeking for any differences among the first, second and third year students.

In this digital era, online texts can also be accessed via portable devices such as tablets as well as smartphones. Hence most students would rather choose to read texts online on the screen rather than on paper. Therefore, educators need to supply them with an adequate amount of knowledge on how to search for necessary information as well as to expose the students to read on the internet. This is important as students are not exposed to the methods and approaches as the internet has been upgraded throughout the years, reading texts online may contain hyperlinks and hypermedia which is not the same as reading traditional, linear prints (Incecay, 2013). In other words, a student who is competent in reading on paper may not be equally competent when reading online texts.

Different students may have different approaches in reading online texts. Certain studies agree that second language learners of the 21st century should be more exposed to online reading as it would suit the students better compared to reading printed materials or books (Jafre, Majid & Anita 2011). Thus, using appropriate reading strategies is helpful to make the reading material easier to be understood. Palani (2012) is of the opinion that, effective reading leads to effective learning. Hence, educators need to know the best way to prepare the students' for reading strategies to be employed in online reading especially university students. As mentioned by Behavlova (2010), university students need to be competent on the internet to succeed in the workplace for that reason online reading strategies are "no longer a luxury but an economic necessity" (Snow, 2002, p. 4).

The purpose of this research is to answer the reasearch question to: "What are the reading strategies employed by postgraduate TESL learners in reading online texts at a public university located in Bangi?". More specifciely, this research has two objectives:

- (1) To identify the reading strategies used by TESL postgraduate students at a public university in Bangi when reading online texts
- (2) To determine whether or not there is a significant difference between Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 TESL postgraduate students when reading online texts

The paper has four parts. First, it discusses the existing literature relavant to online reading strategies. Then the research methodology is presented and the data is analyzed. Next, the findings are discussed and summarised. The paper concludes with the implications of the study.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Online Reading Strategies

Learning strategies are students' techniques, behaviours, and actions in a variety of learning contexts (Oxford, 1990). Even though previous researches approach this matter in different ways, quiet a number of them agree that strategy use enhances learning in efficient and effective ways (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). As online reading has been implemented in most universities around the world, students' may transfer their print-base reading strategies to online reading, but the students' need to use additional strategies to deal with the extra features on the web such as hyperlinks, glossaries and highlighters (Ketabi, Ghavamnia & Rezazadeh 2012). With these new features online, students' can be led quickly into an entirely new site by clicking on links or related content as well as looking up for new meanings.

2.2 Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies may be defined as the process of understanding the ways to learn, what is required in learning as well as the most suited strategy to the learning task (Wong 2015). Reading comprehension, which is an essential part in life and language classrooms, is affected by metacognition (Ceylan & Harputlu 2015). Therefore it is safe to say reading may be comprehended easily by using the correct metacognitive strategies as they can appropriately relate the given task to their own abilities and efforts to deal with the task and strategies that should be used to complete the online reading process (Mesgar, Nadzrah and Zaini, 2012).

Due to the importance of metacognitive strategies in ESL reading, Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002, p. 4), categorized metacognitive strategies into the following:

"1. Global reading strategies - readers carefully plan their reading by using techniques such as having purpose in mind and previewing text.

2. Problem solving strategies - readers work directly with text to solve problems while reading such as adjusting speed of reading, guessing meaning of unknown words and rereading text.

3. Support strategies - readers use basic support mechanisms to aid reading like using dictionary, highlighting and taking notes.”

2.3 Past Studies

A study by Zailani and Liza (2016) provided an example of the use of LLSs strategies by examining 155 students at University Sultan Zainal Abidin's (UniSZA) extent of the use of strategies when reading online, in an academic setting and also to investigate whether differences in the use of the strategies between students in Faculty of Languages and Communication (FBK) and Faculty of Information Technology (FIT). The researchers also used OSORS by Anderson (2003) to collect the students' answers. Findings proposed that students are all users of strategies and field of studies has no influence on the type of overall strategies preferred. However, there were difference between FBK and FIT students for support strategies. FIT students reported a higher use of support strategies than FBK students.

Meanwhile a study by Fatimah and Mohammad (2012) which was conducted at Imam University, Saudi Arabia, examined 110 English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The researchers mentioned that the students preferred Problem solving strategies followed by Global reading strategies and Support strategies. In addition, the findings showed that age and level of study, time spent online and years of using the computer do not have significant effect online reading strategies use. Furthermore, the use of internet for doing the class assignments and gender do not have an effect on global strategies and problem-solving strategies while they have an effect on the use of support strategies

As a result, it is important to know about metacognitive processes to gain knowledge of reading strategies that will assist university learners on how to acquire knowledge through reading texts academically (Behavlova, 2010). Learners too need to develop and adopt their metacognitive reading skills and strategies to be successful online readers while teachers should encourage them to know the advantages of reading online and to motivate them in performing online tasks.

3.0 Methodology

The participants of this survey were 90 TESL postgraduate students from a public university in Bangi, Malaysia. These participants comprised of both male and female students. 30 participants from Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 were chosen respectively.

A descriptive analysis was used to find the Mean as well as the Standard Deviation (SD) for each strategy; Global Reading Strategies, Problem Solving Strategies and Support Strategies meanwhile the difference among Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 TESL post graduate students reading strategies were examined using ANOVA. The participant's demographic profile was also analysed in order to gain insight on the participant's background information.

The participants were approached before their class session and were required to answer a survey regarding their online reading strategies. The Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) by Anderson (2003) was used in this article. They were informed about the objectives of the questions. Any questions asked by the participants were clarified. Once they finished answering the survey, they were requested to check their responses for incompleteness or missing answers. The survey consists of a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The data collected in the study were analyzed

using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to find the strategy most used by the participants. These participants were chosen because as students at the tertiary level in the 21st century, these students need to know which reading strategy will be beneficial to them. This is important because students which are not exposed to the techniques and strategies of understanding the read text, will not able to practice ways to learn text reading and comprehension effectively (Yahya, Zamri & Noradinah, 2014).

4.0 Findings And Discussions

4.1 What are the reading strategies used by TESL post graduate students at a public university in Bangi when reading online texts?

The analysis of the data was based on the students' responses to 38 items, for which they were required to tick any of the five options, namely Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Data were divided in their respective categories; Global Reading Strategies, Problem Solving Strategies and Support Strategies. Mean and SD were given to enhance the data analysis as can be shown in Table 4.1a below.

Table 4.1a Students' results regarding their online reading strategies

Types	Strategies	M	S.D
GLOB	1. I have a purpose in my mind when I read online	3.82	0.86
GLOB	2. I participate in live chat with other learners of English.	3.00	1.13
GLOB	3. I participate in live chat with native speakers of English.	2.68	1.05
GLOB	4. I take notes while reading on-line to help me understand what I read	3.57	0.98
GLOB	5. I think about what I know to help me understand what I read on-line	3.90	0.69
GLOB	6. I take an overall view of the on-line text to see what it is about before reading it.	3.72	0.95
GLOB	7. When on-line text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	3.71	1.05
GLOB	8. I think about whether the content of the on-line text fits my reading purpose.	3.78	0.73
GLOB	9. I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading on-line.	3.96	0.70
GLOB	10 I review the on-line text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization	3.53	0.82
GLOB	11 I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	3.86	0.96
GLOB	12 I print out a hard copy of the on-line text then underline or circle information to help me remember it	3.51	1.11
GLOB	13 I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading on-line.	3.86	0.69

GLOB	14	When reading on-line, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore	3.83	0.74
GLOB	15	I use reference materials (e.g. an on-line dictionary) to help me understand what I read on-line	3.83	0.90
GLOB	16	When on-line text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading	3.99	0.80
GLOB	17	I read pages on the Internet for academic purposes.	3.67	0.94
GLOB	18	I use tables, figures, and pictures in the on-line text to increase my understanding.	3.74	0.87
PROB	19	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading on-line.	3.72	0.82
PROB	20	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading on-line.	3.77	0.77
PROB	21	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read online.	3.67	0.89
PROB	22	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read on-line.	3.86	0.83
PROB	23	I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information.	3.82	.856
PROB	24	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the on-line text.	3.47	0.83
PROB	25	I go back and forth in the on-line text to find relationships among ideas in it.	3.73	0.67
PROB	26	I check my understanding when I come across new information.	3.89	0.61
PROB	27	I try to guess what the content of the on-line text is about when I read.	3.94	0.71
PROB	28	When on-line text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	4.18	0.77
PROB	29	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the on-line text.	3.50	0.95
SUP	30	I check to see if my guesses about the on-line text are right or wrong.	3.67	0.79
SUP	31	When I read on-line, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	3.81	0.70
SUP	32	I scan the on-line text to get a basic idea of whether it will serve my purposes before choosing to read it	3.72	0.85
SUP	33	I read pages on the Internet for fun.	3.37	1.03

SUP	34 I critically evaluate the on-line text before choosing to use information I read online.	3.60	0.80
SUP	35 I can distinguish between fact and opinion in on-line texts.	3.73	0.73
SUP	36 When reading on-line, I look for sites that cover both sides of an issue.	3.68	0.78
SUP	37 When reading on-line, I translate from English into my native language.	3.22	1.12
SUP	38 When reading on-line, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.	3.56	0.90

Glob (Global Strategy), Prob (Problem Solving Strategy), Sup (Supporting Strategy)
M= Mean S.D. = Standard Deviation

The higher usage of the strategy indicates a higher Mean, meanwhile the lower usage of the strategy indicates a lower Mean. Table 4.1b depicts the top seven and the bottom seven strategies as reported by the students. It is worth mentioning that among the top seven strategies, four are from Problem Solving Strategy while the bottom seven strategies were three from Global Strategy. This indicates that Problem Solving Strategy are the most common used strategy among the students.

Table 4.1b Top seven and bottom seven reading strategies

Top Seven Strategies	Bottom Seven Strategies
28. When on-line text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading (PROB)	10. I review the on-line text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization. (GLOB)
9. I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading on-line. (GLOB)	29. I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the on-line text. (PROB)
27. I try to guess what the content of the on-line text is about when I read. (PROB)	24. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the on-line text. (PROB)
26. I check my understanding when I come across new information. (PROB)	33. I read pages on the Internet for fun. (SUP)
11. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration. (GLOB)	37. When reading on-line, I translate from English into my native language. (SUP)
13. I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading on-line. (GLOB)	2. I participate in live chat with other learners of English. (GLOB)
22. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read on-line. (PROB)	3. I participate in live chat with native speakers of English. (GLOB)

4.2 Is there a significant difference among Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 TESL postgraduate students when reading online texts?

The second research question focused on identifying whether the reading strategies used among Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 students differ from one another. The results of the ANOVA show that for the overall OSORS, there was only one strategy that had a significant difference between the three groups.

The results indicated a significant difference with item 3 “I participate in live chat with native speakers of English” within the three groups $F(2,87) = 3.66$, $p = 0.03$. Post Hoc comparison using the Least Significant Different (LSD) test indicated that the mean score for Year 1 ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.93$) was significantly different from Year 2 ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.05$). The mean score of Year 2 also displayed a significant difference from Year 3 ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.03$) students. Meanwhile Year 1 and Year 3 students do not have a significant difference.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the online reading strategies of TESL postgraduate students in a public university as well as the significant differences used by Year 1, 2 and 3 students in using the strategies via questionnaire.

The results of the present study enhanced our understanding of the TESL postgraduate students' online reading strategies. Among the three strategy groups which are Global, Problem Solving and Support Strategies, the most used strategy used was Problem Solving Strategy followed by Support Strategies and Global Strategies. The result of the study has similar results to previous studies which were using similar instruments (e.g. Anderson, 2003; Shang, 2016). This is in contrast with Mohamad et al (2015) which indicated that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) undergraduate students preferred Global Strategies similar to Rastakhiz & Safari (2014) which also indicated that undergraduate Iranian EFL students preferred Global Strategies. Regarding to the results for the difference in Year 1, 2 and 3, only one item was identified to have a significant difference between the three years.

The results may be different from previous studies as the participants may have a different background as well as level of education. Besides that, the reading purposes may differ from one another. As a result, postgraduate students may use more Problem solving strategies as they are required to search for their own reading materials for classroom session in contrast with undergraduate students as lecturers usually provide the materials for them.

Year of study may be an important factor in determining one's reading strategy. The findings obtained from the current study revealed that only one strategy which was “I participate in live chat with native speakers of English” had a significant difference between Year 1 and Year 2 students as well as Year 2 and Year 3 students. Taken together, these results suggest that higher level of study may likely participate in live chats with native speakers.

Thus, through this study, students should be aware of the importance of strategies employed in online reading as the world is increasing the use of technology and using paper is considered a traditional method. Students should also be conscious of the various reading strategies in order to have meaningful reading. Educators also play a vital role in helping the students find the most suitable strategy for the students and Educators should conduct more teacher centred classes to help the students become more independent in their reading.

However, this study only consists of 30 participants in each respective year as the number of students who are undergoing classes are not a large number thus the results cannot represent the whole postgraduate students. In other words, having a larger sample may have a stronger analysis. Moreover, further studies might explore how readers use strategies when they read for different purposes, such as academic and non-academic purposes. Finally, there is a need for empirical research about how to teach Saudi EFL readers to comprehend hypertext.

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